

How to Pray for Daily Forgiveness - 51

Heidelberg Catechism Season 11

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We now will read Psalm 51.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.¹

¹ Psalm 51:1-19.

Thus far, the reading of God's precious Word.

Dear congregation, a woman has been brutally raped. The police have caught the culprit. He is arraigned, brought to trial and convicted. There is no doubt about his guilt. But at his sentence the guilty man casts an evil eye towards the victim. At the same time, a would be counselor encourages the victim to forgive her attacker. Should she do so? The counselor says, "Well, it is the only way to get closure for yourself. You will not know rest until you forgive."

That makes good psychological sense, of course, but is that what God wants us to do? Is that really the Christian thing to do?

Well, that question we want to look at with you this morning from the words of our text that you can find in Matthew six verse 12.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."²

And we will see that in conjunction with Lord's Day 51 of our Heidelberg Catechism which you can find on page 86 in the back of the Psalter.

Which is the fifth petition? Question 126. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. That is, be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood not to impute to us poor sinner our transgressions nor that depravity which always cleaves to us even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, but it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.

With God's help we want to look, then, at the theme with you of how to pray for daily forgiveness. We will see that in three thoughts. First we have to pray with contrition. Do not impute to us poor sinners our transgressions. No, that depravity which always cleaves to us. Second, we are to pray with confidence. Be pleased for the sake of Christ's blood not to impute to us our transgressions. And, third, we are to pray with charity. Even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor. How to pray for daily forgiveness. We have to pray it with contrition, confidence and charity.

This morning we are called to consider the fifth petition of our Lord's perfect pattern prayer. The fourth petition, you recall, was:

"Give us this day our daily bread."³

And that petition is linked together with the fifth by the little word and.

"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors."⁴

² Matthew 6:12.

³ Matthew 6:11.

⁴ Mathew 6:12.

Now this little word “and” is important for two reasons. First, because it connects our physical needs and our spiritual needs. And the two are connected. We are one whole in body and soul. And so we are instructed to pray:

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us [this day] our debts, as we forgive our debtors⁵

This day, you see, the word “this day” really applies to both sides of this equation or both aspects of this double petition. So just as we need food for our bodies every day, so we need forgiveness for our souls every day. And only then can all our needs be met. The whole need of man, body and soul.

Now that is consistent, isn't it, with what we heard way back in Lord's Day one when we were instructed at the very beginning of the catechism.

What is your only comfort in life and death in soul and body? What is the comfort that you have that meets all your needs every day?

Well, we need daily bread and we need daily forgiveness.

Now, secondly, this little word “and” connects these spiritual and physical realms not only, but it does so to teach us that our lives in this world are never merely for this world. We live in a society, of course, that is very physically oriented. And you young people are particularly aware of that. Neither every form of mass media today from a thousand angles is telling you how important it is that you are good looking and that you are up to date in your clothing, that your possessions coincide with what is popular, what is the fad at the moment. And so bread, the things of this world, possessions, good looks, carnal things. These are the important things our society tells you today.

But spiritual things take a back seat. They are not that important, society says. But Jesus tells us, yes, they are. You are to pray for your daily bread. That is foundational. You can't survive without physical things, but right behind it, connected to it and is this grand and glorious spiritual need for forgiveness of sins.

And so, you see, Jesus said:

“...man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”⁶

We have spiritual need, predominantly spiritual need. In fact, life with lots of bread, but without spiritual communion with God is still an empty life. And so this little word “and” brings this together for us. We need both physical and spiritual benediction from God.

⁵ Matthew 6:11-12.

⁶ Luke 4:4.

Now this Lord's Day, of course, is about the latter, the spiritual need, the forgiveness of sins. And the first thing it tells us once we move beyond that word "and" is that we must pray this prayer daily with contrition.

Now the word "contrition" literally means, according to the Oxford dictionary, the action of rubbing things together or against each other, grinding or pounding or bruising. Figuratively it came to mean, therefore, the condition of being bruised in my heart. And so to have a heart of contrition means to feel bruised because of sin, to have sorrow of mind because of my faults and the injuries I have done. And this kind of contrition, to be contrite in heart is something God will not despise. That is what Psalm 51 says.

"...a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."⁷

A heart of contrition. And you see this heart of contrition in what our instructor says. He says, "Do not..." He says, "When I pray 'Forgive us my debts as ... our debts, as we forgive our debtors,' we are praying do not impute to us poor sinners our transgressions, nor that depravity which always cleaves to us."

You can hear his sorrow, can't you, his contrition, that he is not what he wants to be. And so he prays every day for forgiveness.

Now why is this important? Some people actually, even some who claim to be Christians today, they say, "You don't have to pray every day for forgiveness. You are forgiven, past, present and future. You don't need to pray this prayer anymore. You are beyond this. You don't need to ask, especially if you are a mature saint for daily forgiveness."

Well, that is not what Jesus taught. He said, "Pray. Give... forgive us our debts, not just once, but again and again, as we forgive our debtors."

John Calvin said, "Unless god unceasingly forgives, we are lost. We need fresh applications of the blood of Jesus."

Well, let me give you three major reasons why this petition for forgiveness must be prayed with contrition. The first reason is because we need forgiveness every single day. Why is that important? Well, I have got several reasons to tell you why that is important. The first is this. It is the only way to maintain contact with the living God. Without a daily relationship, without the way of repentance, contrition, contrition and repentance really are synonyms aren't they? Without that daily repentance, you see, I am not going to remain close to God. I am going to lose spiritual communion. You know what it is like, true believer, when you for a few days don't ask for forgiveness and you grow sluggish spiritually. You lose power, spiritual power with God and with man. You lose your fruitfulness.

Then, too, secondly, repentance is something God would have his people do, as Martin

⁷ Psalm 51:17.

Luther put it, life long, every day. We constantly need self examination. We cannot fly to his blood too often.

Now where those people get confused who say, “Well, your sins are already forgiven, you don’t have to ask for them every day,” is they are forgetting that the Christian lives in an already, not yet world. That is what the New Testament teaches us again and again. Already, yes, already we are forgiven in Jesus by faith. We are sanctified and we are seated with Christ. We are glorified even, Romans 8:30 says and in the past tense, because positionally our salvation is sure in Christ. We are justified if we are believers.

But in terms of sanctification, in terms of our daily condition, you see, we are in a process. We haven’t arrived. We are in a pilgrimage. We need ongoing faith and ongoing contrition and ongoing forgiveness and ongoing prayer and ongoing perseverance. So we need to pray this every day.

And, thirdly, if we don’t pray it every day with contrition, we are liable to damage the cause and the kingdom of God, because when we grow sloppy spiritually, sin is always waiting for us to lord itself over our lives. So just like we don’t go two or three days without natural food knowing we are going to abuse our bodies if we do, so we will abuse our spiritual life, our souls, if we go without seeking forgiveness of a few days at a time. And then we bring a blight on the cause of God.

You see, unconfessed sin separates us from God. That is what David experienced with Psalm 51. That is why he cries out:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”⁸

He feels that separation.

“Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.”⁹

The things he prayed for were the things he was missing because for a while he was living in sin and he wasn’t seeking daily forgiveness. So he prays for a corrupted heart. Give me a new clean one. His character has been eroded. So he prays for a steadfast spirit. His sense of the Spirit’s presence was withdrawn so he prays, “Don’t take thy Holy Spirit from me.” His joy was destroyed so he prays, “Restore to me the joy of my salvation.”

You see, sin indulged in and unconfessed leaves us compromised and broken and empty and abandoned and grieved. It puts distance between God and our soul.

Isaiah 59 verse two. Your sins, that is your unconfessed sins, have made separation between God and your soul.

⁸ Psalm 51:10.

⁹ Psalm 51:11-12.

Fourthly, we offend God if we don't ask for daily forgiveness. Look at Peter before God in the morning and pray as I trust you do. But you come in your sinful garb already in the morning. And you don't ask for forgiveness. From the very beginning you lean on your own righteousness. It is an offense to God. God wants us to lean on his righteousness.

And then, fifthly we damage our own conscience when we don't pray daily with contrition for forgiveness, when we don't fly every day to the blood of Jesus. We desensitize our own consciences. We lose appetite for spiritual things.

Sometimes we wonder why we get so cold and so stale spiritually. Well, could it be, my friend, that you grow cold because you are not earnestly asking every day with fresh contrition? Forgive me this day my debts before thee.

And then, sixthly, our prayers lose their power if we don't repent and ask for God for forgiveness daily. We lose touch with God. We no longer are a righteous man whose prayers avail much if we are not getting cleansing every day from God.

And our intercessory prayers grow weak as well. When they grow weak for ourselves they grow weak for others. You see, the power of prayer is stripped away. It is like Samson losing his hair. When we don't ask every day for forgiveness, our power is gone. Our ministry of prayer becomes weak when we forget to intercede for ourselves and for others.

And, finally, we need to pray every day with contrition to keep a short account with God. So often when we deal with people, people come to us so late in the process who say, "Why didn't you come to me sooner? Why did you let this fester for two months? Why did you let this marriage go down hill of three years and you finally came to me now for advice? Why didn't you come right away?"

And that is our problem spiritually, too. You see, so many times we sin so many times in so many ways every day. Every evening we can't even remember all our sins, can we? But then if you let those sins fester for days and weeks, pretty soon you are not aware of them, pretty soon you don't think about them and all this account of debt builds up in God's sight tragically when we don't ask every day for forgiveness.

Keep a short account with God. Every day go to him with contrition for cleansing.

So that is the first major reason why we need to go every day with contrition to God.

The second reason lies in this little word "debts." We need daily contrition because we are daily making ourselves indebted to God. Obviously this word "debts" is very important here. It is used twice, once in the form of debts and once in the form of debtors. And from Luke 11 we learn that this word "debts" is the same thing as the word forgiveness or rather sin. Forgive us our sins or our trespasses. And yet the word "debts"

has a particular stamp of its own, doesn't it? The word "debts" means that someone has rights over us. If you are in debt to someone they have a right to payment. You owe something that really belongs to that person. And so when we pray, "Forgive us our debts," we are recognizing, you see, that God has a right to us. He has a right to my time. He has a right to my possessions. He has a right to everything that I am. I owe everything to God. He has created me to worship him. He has a right to my soul and to my body. And so when I say, "Forgive us our debts," I am really saying, "Lord, forgive every single sin, because I owe thee righteousness. I don't owe thee sin. I owe thee righteousness and every sin is a trespass against thee. I am not using thy honor and thy glory aright. Every sin is selfish. Every sin is a debt incurred. Every sin is a robbing of thee, my worthy creator."

"...forgive us our debts."¹⁰

And then the third reason, the final reason I give you why we need to pray for forgiveness with contrition every day is because of the depravity of our core nature. By nature, you see, we have sin at the core of our being.

You remember what Luther said. He said, "Original sin in me is like my beard. Every day I shave off the outside. I think I look clean but the next morning, there the roots of my beard are coming out again. So sin comes from within a man, Jesus said. And every day I need to suppress, sanctify, save. I need to come to God for forgiveness but I need to also recognize that deep within me is the problem and that I need to be cured in my heart. Lord, do not impute to us poor sinners," says our instructor, "our transgressions, nor that depravity, that sinful nature that lives within us, that clings to us, that cleaves to us."

Isn't that amazing that here we are on Lord's Day 51. This Christian has become very mature, you see, through the experience of misery, deliverance and gratitude. And now he is nearing the very end of the catechism, nearing the end of all these doctrines of grace and he says, "Lord, I am still such a sinner. I am still depraved. Depravity clings, cleaves to me."

That is amazing. What a confession. Lord, I can come no further than this in my sanctification. I am still just a poor sinner. Forgive me, poor sinner that I am.

Now this isn't just the language of piety. This isn't just saying the right thing. This is something our instructor feels deeply within him. And, dear friends, the more mature we are in grace, the more we will be aware of our wretched inner core depravity. The more we will cry out, "Forgive me poor sinner."

And notice he doesn't say, "me" actually. He says, "us." He includes the whole corporate family of God as the Lord's prayer itself does. There are no exceptions, you see. No one is beyond this. The word "us" describes all God's children. Can you, too, this morning, my friend, can you, too, say this is your daily prayer? Lord, forgive us, forgive

¹⁰ Matthew 6:12.

me, too, as a poor sinner all this transgression, all this debt? It cleaves to me. Flowing out of my inner depravity.

David put it this way.

“...my sin is ever before me.”¹¹

You see, it is one thing to be forgiven unto justification. And it is another thing to wrestle with sin daily in my sanctification. And it is there that is our instructor’s focus this morning. Lord’s Day 23 was justification. Lord’s Day 51 is sanctification. And now he comes before God. He says, “Lord, my life is nothing but a heap of debts. My life is a plurality of sin every day. But the core problem is my heart, my inward depravity, the lust of the eye, the pride of life that flow out from within. Oh, God, forgive this poor sinner. Oh, [?].”

I can’t do it myself. I can’t change my heart. I can’t change my beard. I can’t change my inner core being. It must come from thee, Lord. Forgive.

Another word forgive means to remit. In the original Greek it means to cancel and to send away. The idea is that when you forgive a person, you free him from obligations both moral and legal. And so when God forgives, he cancels all the debt for Christ’s sake. That is justification. But he also frees a sinner also from having to pay the debt, but also the debt itself. And he calls us then to holiness. He says, “I will wipe it away. I will send it away. Ask of me.”

So the believer comes and asks. He says, “Oh, God send away my sin. Help me to lay aside, as we heard last week, every weight and the sin that does so easily beset me to run with patience the race that is set before me looking to Jesus. But, Lord, I struggle in that race. I am a sinner inside, but help me, Lord, Purge me. Purge me with hyssop, Psalm 51, and I shall be clean. Take it away. Cancel it. Remit it. Don’t let sin besmirch my spiritual record. Wash me clean. Make the slate clean between thee and my soul. Wash me. Cleanse me from within. Take sin itself away. Forgive us our debts.”

Well, that is what it means to pray for forgiveness with contrition. But also we pray for forgiveness with confidence. I used to say, “How can contrition and confidence go together?”

Well, look at our answer. Be pleased for the sake of Christ’s blood not to impute, not to reckon to my account as a poor sinner this transgression, or these transgressions, this depravity.

You see here is the ground. Here is the confidence. here is the security. Be pleased for the sake of Christ’s blood. This is everything in the Christian life. No blood, no remission of sins, says the Bible. And no blood of Jesus, no remission of sins because no one but Jesus can satisfy the infinite wrath of God because no one else is infinite in obedience or can

¹¹ Psalm 51:3.

be. And so only Jesus, only Jesus' blood can wash away our sin, can pay for our sin. And so with all this contrition and all this sorrow for sin and this grief and this bruising, our instructor brings it all to God, doesn't he? In Jesus' blood and he says, "Don't impute my debts to me for the sake of Christ's blood. This is my confidence. This is my pleading ground. This is my hope, my refuge, my security, my all. This gives me comfort."

I look not only to Jesus' blood for my justification so that I can be right with God, but I look to Jesus Christ's blood also for a daily purging in the way of sanctification. As Isaiah puts it, with his stripes we are healed day by day. And so day by day I come with confidence even as I come with contrition. I come looking to Jesus. I come resting in Jesus. I come lean upon Jesus' blood again.

As [?] said it, "Thousands of times." It is the blood.

And so when God came to Israel when he saw the blood on the door posts he passed by. That is my confidence. I am under the blood. I am behind the blood. I am sheltered in the blood. Everything rests in the blood of Jesus, because by that blood, he the infinite Son of God, Son of Man has paid for all the hell that all his elect deserve forever and infinitely more. There is infinite satisfaction in the blood and therefore, you see, Isaiah can say to that poor sinner whose inward depravity clings to him:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.¹²

Double? Yes. How? The blood. It is the blood of Jesus Christ. It is infinite satisfaction in his blood. There is more forgiveness available in the blood of Jesus than you will ever need. His blood is mightier than your sin. There is an abundance, you see. There is bread enough and to spare in the Father's house in the blood of Jesus. And so we come, don't we. If we are believers we come with confidence even as we come with contrition.

Forgive us this day all our debts.

Is that how you are coming to God, to Christ every day? Are you trusting in the blood, that the blood will cover all your sins objectively in God's sight so that he may be just and receive you on the grounds of justice? And are you trusting it subjectively, pleading it, having it applied to your soul by the work of the Spirit every day, encouraged in his blood? There is no shortfall. Here you rest. Here your soul finds peace. And so every day you come.

"And forgive us our debts."¹³

¹² Isaiah 40:1-2.

¹³ Matthew 6:12.

You pray this petition with contrition. You pray it with confidence, but you also pray it with charity as we will see in our third thought.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”¹⁴

Our instructor says of that last part of the fifth petition, “Even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us, that it is our firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor.”

From the heart. So there must be loving forgiveness, hence, my third point: We pray this petition with charity, with love.

Where God forgives then we will show the charity of forgiveness to those who have offended us. If we taste his great forgiveness, we cannot not forgive our debtors. Now we do that always imperfectly, of course. And so our instructor is not saying that we have to be absolutely perfect in such a way that if we want to be forgiven one day in heaven, God will measure our forgiveness of others and therefore on that basis he will forgive us. So if we forgive others 90 percent, he will forgive us 90 percent. No, no. But this is what flows out of knowing God’s forgiveness. There will be an attitude of reconciliation spring up in the believer’s heart.

Paul says it this way in Ephesians four verse 32.

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”¹⁵

And the verb here is in the imperative form. It is something that must be done. And it shows us, you see, that God puts great emphasis upon forgiveness and reconciliation in all our relationships.

Now what does this involve? Well, it involves two major things. First of all, forgiveness in the Bible is defined as an act of not remembering the faults of others.

Jay Adams in his excellent book *From Forgiveness to Forgiving* says this. “To not remember is simply a graphic way of saying, ‘I will not bring up these matters to you or others in the future. I will bury them and not exhume the bones to beat you over the head with them. I will never use these sins against you.’”

This is the attitude of a Christian. You see, forgiving doesn’t involve amnesia as if we have no memory bank whatsoever. When God even says, “I will cast your sins behind my back into the sea of eternal forgetfulness,” it doesn’t mean that God somehow then becomes not omniscient and he doesn’t know everything anymore, but it means I will never use these sins against you anymore. I will never recall them. I will never bring them up into my mind and lay them before you. I will never charge you with them again.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:32.

And how many believers don't understand that? Some of us don't understand this and how important this is even in our families. The husband reminds his wife of a sin she committed five years ago. It is out of place. When Mary has been asked for forgiveness and he has forgiven, that sin may not be brought up again, you see. It must be forgotten. Or the daughter sins against her mother. Maybe it was disrespectful for a few years. Maybe she went through some teen rebellion. And 10 years later when that daughter has a child that child begins to act rebelliously and mother brings it back to the daughter again. Well, that is how you were.

No, no, no. That is an act of unforgiveness.

When the past offense is remembered and then used against the person who sought forgiveness, true reconciliation hasn't take place yet. And the tragedy is that often in cases like these, the offended party has promised forgiveness, but never really given it. It is an assumed forgiveness, but not an actual forgiveness.

And so when you hear people say something like this, "Well, I will forgive you, but won't be able to forget it," you know that they are in the wrong place. You know actually you haven't truly forgiven, because that is the way God treats us. How can we say to the Lord, "Lord, thou hast overlooked, forgiven and forgotten millions of my sins and I can't forgive and forget the small piddly things that other people do to me? Small and piddly, of course, compared to what I have done to thee."

It doesn't make any sense.

That is why Jesus says in this prayer, "You have to give evidence that you know forgiveness. And the evidence that you know forgiveness is that you forgive those who have trespassed against you. You must forgive and forget with your whole heart.

The second point is this. Forgiveness of others, as God forgives us is an essential element of Christian living, of our daily lives. You see, God's forgiveness of us is to be the rule and the measure of our forgiveness of others.

Well, what do I mean by that? Well, how does God forgive us? God forgives us for one thing immediately, doesn't he? Immediately.

The psalmist says:

"...but thou art a God ready to pardon."¹⁶

And he says this.

"I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."¹⁷

¹⁶ Nehemiah 9:17.

He doesn't say, "I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord and maybe I hope that some day 10, 20 years from now thou wilt forgive."

No. He [?] them together. Not a moment's hesitation. They are interwoven. I confess. Though forgave. God forgives immediately.

Moses prayed:

"Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people."¹⁸

And the Lord says:

"I have pardoned."¹⁹

You see, it is as if God had anticipated his servant's request.

So we ought to forgive people immediately, as soon as they show their sorrow. Forgive them immediately. And then God forgives fully, doesn't he? He doesn't give a partial forgiveness. Partial forgiveness is no real forgiveness. God forgives 100 percent, because, you see, the Son of God has paid the price. And at the empty grave, the Father has ratified that price. He was delivered for our offenses and was raised for our justification. And so now Jesus saves to the uttermost all that come unto God by him. Nothing stands between the greatest sinner and his full salvation in Jesus when by the grace of the Spirit we believe in Jesus, he passes out of the court of divine justice, not simply protecting from arrest, but that sinner fully and honorably and eternally is discharged, Christ having done all for him. That is what the blood does. It forgives fully.

And then God's forgiveness is also a hearty forgiveness that comes from the heart. There is no coldness. There is no begrudging forgiveness in God's part. God doesn't say, "Oh, well, I guess I will forgive you."

No, God's forgiveness is cheerful. It is whole hearted. It is eager. It is not a hand stretched out reluctantly to half shake our hand. It is an embrace. It is the prodigal's father running to the prodigal with arms of mercy wrapped around the son and lips of mercy kissing him and tears of mercy flowing down his neck and words of mercy. It is full and wholehearted and nothing is held back.

Ephesians five verse two says that we are to be imitators of God. That means that we are to live in such a way that we resemble God's charity to the lost and broken world. That means, friends, that whenever we have conflict with one another it is our highest calling to model Christ to the world through our actions of forgiveness to one another at all times and in all situations no matter what the degree of offence. Our calling is to follow Christ

¹⁷ Psalm 32:5.

¹⁸ Numbers 14:19.

¹⁹ Numbers 14:20.

and to forgive. True believers must provoke each other to love, to a deeper imitation of God, not to wrath, not to bitterness.

That is the whole point of the parable of the unmerciful servant. God is saying through the unmerciful servant how ridiculous it is to think that I could forgive you and did forgive you millions of dollars worth of debt, so to speak, and then you are going to turn around and you are going to take someone by the throat who owes you two or three dollars, who has offended you in some way that is so small compared to how you have offended me and you are not going to forgive them? How tragic, how ridiculous. How evident that you don't understand the depths of your own depravity and what I have done for you.

You don't understand love, the love of God. You don't understand charity. This has to be our resolution, congregation, even as we feel this evidence of thy grace in us that it is our firm resolution, we determine. We will forgive from the heart our neighbor remembering how God has forgiven us. In other words, you can't be close with God, you can't have a close relationship with God walking with God if you are not walking in loving charity and forgiveness with your neighbor.

Ah, you say, "But if you only knew what they did to me. If you know the stones they were throwing at me. You wouldn't dare to say that."

Yes, I would. Stephen had stones thrown at him, didn't he? They stoned him to death. And as he was lying underneath the pile of stones, what did he say while he was suffocating and dying?

"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."²⁰

"I forgive them."

So how are you reacting when people injure you? How do you treat your enemy? Do you bear grudges? If you do, it shows how little if any you know of the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ. My friend, I say to you this morning if you are a grudge or inner resentment against anyone on this earth, you go and you straighten it out. You ask for forgiveness. You give forgiveness upon repentance and so on. You make it right. You do all I your power to make it right.

Must I forgive every sin? Everything. How many times? Seven times, said Peter. Must we forgive our brother? Seventy times seven, said Jesus, 490. In other words, infinitely.

Why? Why infinitely? Because there is no end to God's forgiveness of me. He has forgiven me much more than 490 times. My forgiveness is to be patterned after his. And I am always to remember no matter what anyone has done to me, it never comes close to being proportionate to what I have done to God. That is the ground of my firm resolution.

²⁰ Acts 7:60.

Friends, we must be not just hearers of the Word, but doers of it.

Well, you say, “It is hard to do.”

Well, I didn’t say it was easy to do, but grace can make it easy. You can cultivate this attitude if you understand what a poor sinner you are and how God has forgiven you, if you understand that Jesus could say on the cross, “Father, forgive them,” when they nailed him to death.

“...forgive them; for they know not what they do.”²¹

How can we not forgive? And, you see, if every day we go to this fountain for forgiveness ourselves, gradually it will become an easier thing as we get more conformed to the image of Christ to forgive others as well. And the more we forgive others the more we will be salt in the earth and light on a hill. So we need to stop making excuses for our lack of a charitable forgiving spirit.

John says:

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.”²²

In other words, the evidence of the love of God will be a charitable, forgiving spirit to others, humbling, a resolving to forgive them. Is that what you display in your home, outside of your home? If not, all the more reason to go again today. Forgive us our debts. My lack of forgiving my debtor is another debt I owe to thee, Lord. Forgive me. Forgive me this resolution.

But that leaves us with one problem and I want to address that before I close briefly. What if the sinner who offended me is not repentant? Should we forgive them then? Should this victim that I began this sermon with forgive the man who is being sentenced and casts an evil eye on her?

Well, if he casts an eye of repentance for her the case would be easy, right? If he was repentant, it would be her moral duty to forgive no matter what. We forgive because Christ has forgiven us. But what about cases where the person doesn’t repent? Hard as it may sound, some insist that the granting of forgiveness to the unrepentant is an unbiblical thing, because actually it focuses on ourselves, our own psyche, as it were, rather than upon the true condition and the ultimate well being of those who sinned against us.

Think of it this way. When Ford pardoned Nixon but Nixon had not yet admitted his guilt, was it really good for Nixon to have his slate wiped clean before he repented?

You see, the best thing we can do to an unrepentant sinner is to seek his ultimate

²¹ Luke 23:34.

²² 1 John 4:20.

salvation and that ultimate salvation comes through repentance. That is still God's way to lead to Christ, not a condition, but a way.

So this is only done by pointing to him his sins, not ignoring those sins. Salvation comes through a process that involves conviction of sin. God does not forgive without repentance? He leads us through repentance to forgiveness. So should we treat others the same way?

Well, other people have taken the opposite position. John MacArthur is one of them. He said, "To make conditionality the gist of Christ like forgiving seems to miss the whole point of what Scripture is saying."

So there is two sides to this coin, two view points. Whatever viewpoint you take, one thing is sure. There must never be on our part an unwillingness to forgive. Whatever obstacles there may be in the part of the offender in receiving forgiveness, we from our side must always be willing to forgive.

I think these two view points can be brought together through... and I am offering a new idea here, I realize, but through what I am calling one sided closure and two sided closure. If I am willing to forgive even when someone is not repentant, that gives me one sided closure. It is closed from my side, because I forgive in my heart. But even as I do that, if I truly love the offender, I will still admonish him for his sin because I want his best welfare. And I will still aim for two sided closure that he can repent and be forgiven by me in the right way so that there is a double closure, a closure on both sides.

I believe that is the answer, the basic answer to this difficult theological question.

Now the thing that goes along with that is this. Real repentance is needed. Sometimes people say, "Oh, well, I apologize, then." Or, "If I have done anything to hurt you, I am sorry." But, you see, that is not real repentance. Actually it is a sham repentance. It is a cheap way of circumventing Scripture's demand. What we need to say is this. I have asked God to forgive me because I have sinned and I repent before him and now I am asking you to forgive me, because I repent before you as well."

If someone does that to you, always there can be sided closure because you are called immediately. You cannot refuse. You dare not refuse. You are called immediately to forgive that person, fully, heartily. And then there is this wonderful thing we call two sided closure.

Well, I close this sermon by referring to the apostle John who when he was in his 90s tradition tells us he was carried back to his old church at Ephesus which was being torn asunder by division. He couldn't walk anymore. He was carried up to the pulpit and there he sat, weak and frail. But tradition says that he said just one thing.

"Little children, love one another and forgive one another."

You see, if we truly love, if we truly show charity, we will truly forgive. Then we will truly pray.

“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”²³

So may God grant us to make this firm and gracious resolution with contrition, with confidence and with charity. Amen.

²³ Matthew 6:12.